

Augusta Machine Works (Augusta Lumber Co.), ca. 1850  
Jackson, Adams, and Campbell Streets  
Augusta  
Richmond County  
Georgia

HAER GA-14

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GA,  
123-AUG.  
45-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

THE AUGUSTA MACHINE WORKS (AUGUSTA LUMBER COMPANY)

HAER GA-14

Location: A tract of land bounded by D'Antignac, Jackson, Adams, and Campbell Streets. Augusta, Georgia  
UTM:  
Quad:

Date of Construction: ca. 1850 (original structures)

Present Owners: Louise D. Rigsby Sarah D. Ewing  
753 Aumond Road 2556 Walton Way  
Augusta, Georgia Augusta, Georgia  
Conna C. Smith (address unknown; niece of the above two owners)

Present Use: The last remnants were destroyed in early 1977; a vacant lot with foundations and the canal headrace mark the site.

Significance: The Augusta Machine Works built the first industry located on the Augusta Canal's second level and supplied parts and machinery for canal structures. As the Confederate States Pistol Factory, it manufactured Pigdon-Ansley revolvers, "Confederate Colts," during the Civil War. With its conversion into the Augusta Lumber Company, it exemplified the self-sufficient, self-contained lumber operation.

Historian: Robert C. Jorgensen, 1977

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## THE AUGUSTA MACHINE WORKS

The first industry to locate on the second level of the Augusta Canal after its completion in 1850 was the Augusta Machine Works, built on a tract of land bounded by D'Antignac, Jackson, Adams, and Campbell Streets. Formed for the purpose of "manufacturing agricultural implements, cotton, wool, and the machinery necessary for the fabrication thereof, locomotives, etc.," the company was incorporated on January 14, 1850. [1] Little is known about the machine works' operation except that it did use water power and two structures stood on the premises. Hand-hewn 12x14-inch and 14x16-inch beams spanned the width of the 100x50-foot three-and-one-half-story brick main building. [2] A one-story 40x50-foot wheelhouse was attached to its northeast end. A 50x150-foot brick warehouse existed northeast of the main structure. [3] According to reports of the Augusta Canal engineer, the Machine Works cast gears and other machinery for the canal headgates and the 12th Street gates. [4]

The Augusta Machine Works conveyed the property to the Confederate States of America on August 19, 1862. [5] During the last years of the war, the Confederate States Pistol Factory located its operations in the existing buildings at this location as well as structures located on the site of the future Georgia Iron Works along the canal's second level at 12th Street. [6] Known as Rigdon Ansley and Company, the firm manufactured iron-frame 12-stop cylinder revolvers referred to as the Pigdon-Ansley pistols or the "Confederate Colts" because of their

similarity to the Colt revolver. It is uncertain whether the entire pistol-manufacturing process occurred at each site or a portion of it at both. Between March 1864 and January 1865 when the business closed, approximately 1,000 of the pistols had been made in Augusta. [7]

At the conclusion of the war the property reverted to the United States government; they, in turn, sold it to James A. Gray on December 5, 1867. [8] Apparently, Gray bought the property with the idea of developing it as a future site for a cotton mill since it was located along the canal with turbines and two good-sized buildings already existing. In 1874 he and several others formed a corporation known as the Dublin Mills for the purpose of manufacturing "cotton and woolen fabrics" on a site adjacent to the canal; the corporation received its charter February 28, 1874. [9] The capital stock, set at \$150,000, was raised in Augusta and in the North, but the mill never progressed past its organizational stages, even though a board of directors and president were elected in December 1877. [10] The idea of a factory at the Augusta Machine Works site continued to drag on for several years, with Gray planning to "enlarge the factory in [the] future to [a] great size and capacity, and [having] plenty of room for the erection of operatives and such other houses as may be necessary for the proper running of it." [11] The mill was expected to contain 3,000 spindles and 100 looms and to manufacture colored checks and plaids. [12] Evidently the pipe dreams came to an end, nothing else being written about it after 1878.

Stillwell, Millen and Company [13] purchased the land from Gray's estate in 1889 for \$22,500; they, in turn, sold it to the Augusta Lumber

Company for \$40,000 later that year. [14] On June 24, 1889, the company was incorporated as a "sash and door factory and planing mill" with a capital of \$140,000. [15] Stillwell, Millen and Company acted as the parent company until its sale to the Southern Pine Company of Savannah on August 5, 1895. William Stillwell took charge of operations in the state, and Henry Talmadge of New York City served as president and financial backer of the enterprise. [16]

The Southern Pine Company sold the lumber company to Maurice E. and Sallie W. Dyess between 1924 and 1926, but the firm retained the name Augusta Lumber Company. It continued to be owned and operated by members of the Dyess family [17] until it was purchased by Addison-Rudesal, Inc., in April 1970. The firm moved the company's operations from its original canal site to an industrial park outside the city in 1974. Between 1974 and 1977 the old Augusta Machine Works were leveled in order to save on taxes. Foundations, the headrace, and the turbine wheel pits mark the site.

#### COMPANY OPERATIONS, ADDITIONS, AND ALTERATIONS

The 1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance map reveals the two original buildings, a two-story sawing house, and a one-story office building on the grounds. [18] The planing mill and carpenter's shop were located on the first floor, and the sash, door, and blind manufacturing were on the other floors of the main building. The old warehouse was used as such and also for glazing. The owners quickly expanded the physical plant, and by 1893 recent construction included a 40x100-foot framing shed and

a 30x50-foot storage warehouse, both frame buildings with metal roofs. An 18x20-foot yard office and hardware room, previously mentioned, a 30x195-foot shed for sheltering lumber, a stable, and other minor structures were grouped on the east side of the canal. [19] (Photo No. 1.)

Seventy skilled mechanics manufactured doors, blinds, sashes, mouldings, and ornamental woodwork, and the lumber company also sold shingles, laths, rough and dressed lumber--processed by them from logs shipped in by rail--hardware, glass, and other building supplies. With 150 horsepower derived from the canal to run the machinery, the company was indeed a self-contained and very complete lumber operation. Approximately 4 million feet of lumber was processed annually during this period. [20]

Growth and improvements continued with two vertical turbines installed in April 1900 and a large mail-order house started. (Photo No. 2.) Construction of a large two-story addition on the northwest side and northeast end of the old factory, more lumber sheds, and a new office building was completed by 1904. [22] Expansion across Adams Street to the southwest also occurred.

Changes and improvements continued to occur after the Dyess family purchased the lumber company, one of the first being the installation of a universal uniflow Skinner steam engine number 10499, manufactured by the Skinner Engine Company of Erie, Pennsylvania, around 1926. [23] Two 1903 Georgia Iron Works boilers burned the waste, sawdust, trimmings from lumber, etc., produced by the factory. The owners felt this

process gave the company increased self-sufficiency since they were no longer dependent on the canal's fluctuations for adequate power. Later, the driving shafts were broken down into smaller sections so only those shafts would be turning that were needed to operate specific machinery. [24] Separate motors were attached to the individual pieces of machinery after World War II, and full electric power was purchased from the Georgia Power Company for economic reasons ca. 1956. [25]

Railroad cars laden with timber wound their way through the lumberyard and across Adams Street to a circular sawmill, where the logs were unloaded, cut, kiln-dried, surfaced, and sent to the various departments to be machined into various products. The lumber company's departments included the cabinet shop, framing, door, sash (where they also made blinds), shipping, administrative, warehousing, and glazing departments. Shipment of the finished products went throughout the southeastern United States, and much of their custom woodwork was used in the construction of wealthy northerners' homes in the Aiken, South Carolina, area before the Depression.

Lumber technology and business practices changed and improved when mass production and specialization permeated the industry. The Augusta Lumber Company felt these changes and the social changes in the labor market. Carpenters found it easier to work with the softer white pine than with the yellow pine previously used, and apprentices could not be found to learn the trades required in such a business. Mill-in-transit operations were impossible to compete with because the company was not equipped for mass production. There were instances in which finished

wood products could be purchased more cheaply than the company could make them. A vast amount of capital would have been required to re-orient, re-equip, and completely modernize the plant in order to be competitive. Thus, the Augusta Lumber Company's lumber and finishing trade declined. The decision to sell the company to Addison-Reudesal, Inc., while retaining the land and buildings was made. [26] The old self-sufficient, self-contained lumber company operation (Photo No. 3) was incompatible with the revolution taking place within the industry. The Augusta Lumber Company's history reflected these changes.



Footnotes

1. The incorporators were William M. D'Antignac, John M. Adams, James M. Poe, and William H. Turpin, Jr. Georgia Laws 1845, 1847, 1849/50, pp. 201-2..
2. Interview with George Ewing, former vice-president and general manager of the Augusta Lumber Company, and Louise Rigsby, Augusta, Georgia, 2 August 1977.
3. It is assumed that the warehouse was built at the same time as the main factory since it is doubtful that its construction occurred during the Civil War; and it is known to have existed previous to 1875. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 14 April 1875.
4. Canal Record Book II, p. 131 rpt for December 5, 1855, p. 281 rpt for June 4, 1857, Vault, Municipal Building, Augusta, Georgia.
5. The date is taken from a copy of the Augusta Lumber Company's title abstract in the possession of George Ewing, Augusta, Georgia.
6. Historic American Engineering Record, Augusta Canal Project, Rpt. Number 7, Georgia Iron Works
7. Florence Fleming Corley, Confederate City, Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1865 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 47-48; Earl L. Bell, "Augusta Made 'Confederate Colts,'" Augusta Magazine, Fall 1969, pp. 14-16.
8. Augusta Lumber Company's title abstract in the possession of George Ewing.
9. The original incorporators were John P. King, James A. Gray, James W. Davies, and William S. Roberts. Gray was to receive \$50,000 in stock for the building and land for the mill. Georgia Laws, 1874, p. 266; Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 14 April 1875.
10. (Gray was elected president.) John S. Maxwell, Pleasant A. Stovall, T. R. Gibson, Handbook of Augusta (Augusta: Chronicle and Constitutional Book and Job Printing Est., 1878), pp. 21-2.
11. Ibid., p. 22.
12. J. T. Derry, Georgia: A Guide to the Cities, Towns, Scenery and Resources (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1878), p. 64.
13. William B. Stillwell, Leonard Johnson, and Loring R. Miller were co-partners in the company.

14. Augusta Lumber Company's title abstract in the possession of George Ewing.
15. Louise Rigsby, a paper on the history of the Augusta Lumber Company, ca. 1977. (Typewritten.)
16. Ibid.
17. Maurice E. Dyess served as manager under the former owners between 1906 and 1926 and as president from 1926 till his death in 1942. F. L. Lancaster served as executive vice-president between 1942 and 1955 when George Ewing became vice-president and general manager until its sale in 1970.
18. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps were available for the years 1890 and 1904, and a South-Eastern Underwriters Association Fire Insurance map for 1948.
19. The Augusta Exchange compiler, The Industrial Advantages of Augusta, Georgia (Augusta: The Akehurst Publishing Co., 1893), pp. 77-8. An 800-pound solid brass bell dated 1889 and manufactured by the McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore, Maryland, hung in a cupola on the main building, evidently another addition by the lumber company. A 250-pound brass and bronze steam whistle signalled the beginning and ending of each day's labor. Both are in the possession of George Ewing.
20. Ibid.
21. Since there were drawings made and dated at this time, it is assumed that the original turbines were taken out and new ones put in. Steam power was also being used. These turbines may still be in place, though under a concrete slab.
22. 1904 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.
23. The steam engine operated under 125 to 140 pounds of steam pressure and turned A/C generator type A.T.B. 36-250-200. A General Electric exciter was mounted above it.
24. A list of Surplus Machinery and Equipment is presented in Appendix I. George Ewing compiled the list as a guide in the sale of the equipment in February 1973.
25. Interview with George Ewing, former vice-president and general manager of the Augusta Lumber Company, and Louise Rigsby, Augusta, Georgia, 2 August 1977. Most of the information concerning the Augusta Lumber Company was gained through this interview.

26. Addison-Rudesal, Inc., relocated outside Augusta, is primarily a wholesale lumber warehouse operation.

Selected Bibliography

Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel provides a contemporary picture of the industries struggling to get started and many times reports the organizational events and future plans for different industries. An excellent source.

Augusta Exchange, compiler. The Industrial Advantages of Augusta, Georgia. Augusta: The Akehurst Publishing Company, 1893.

Bell, Earl L. "Augusta-Made 'Confederate Colts,'" Augusta Magazine. Fall 1969, pp. 14-16.

An article dealing more with small arms in general, but with references to the pistol factory in Augusta.

Corley, Florence Fleming. Confederate City, Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1865. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1960.

A good source book with an excellent bibliography on Augusta during these years. It was very useful in obtaining information about the pistol factory during the war.

Ewing, George, former vice-president and general manager of the Augusta Lumber Company, and Rigsby, Louise. Augusta, Georgia. Interview, 2 August 1977.

The greater part of the information about the Augusta Lumber Company's early operation and organization was obtained through the interview. Pictures of the lumber company's machinery and a title abstract were in the possession of Mr. Ewing. Mrs. Rigsby had written a short paper on the history of the lumber company.

Maxwell, John L., Stovall, Pleasant A., and Gibson, T. R. Handbook of Augusta. Augusta: Chronicle and Constitutionalist Book and Job Printing Est., 1878.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for the years 1890 and 1904, and a South-Eastern Underwriters Association Fire Map for 1948, were helpful in showing the physical growth of the company through the years.